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U.S. Begins Proceedings to Deport an Ex-Nicaragua Rebel Leader

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The Immigration and Naturalization Service has started proceedings that could lead to the deportation of a former Nicaraguan rebel leader who has been critical of Reagan Administration policies, an immigration official said yesterday.

The official, Perry A. Rivkind, the I.N.S. district director in Miami, said he had reviewed the file of Edgar Chamorro, a former director of the Nicaraguan Democratic Force, the major guerrilla group fighting the Sandinista Government, after reading an article written by Mr. Chamorro last week that was critical of United States activities in Nicaragua.

Mr. Rivkind denied that there was any connection between the exclusionary order issued to Mr. Chamorro and the critical statements made by him.

The exclusionary order says that Mr. Chamorro is in this country illegally and that he must appear before an immigration judge to state why he should not be deported. Mr. Rivkind said the State Department had rejected Mr. Chamorro's application for political asylum, made in February 1980.

Mr. Chamorro was forced out of the rebel group in November 1984 after accusations that he had disclosed information about secret manuals that were reportedly financed by the Central Intelligence Agency and that were distributed among guerrillas.

"Once I stopped working for the F.D.N., they stopped my privileges," Mr. Chamorro said in a telephone interview from his home in Key Biscayne, Fla., where he has lived with his family since 1979. "Is this just a coincidence? My legal status had never been questioned while I was working with them. I question why this is happening right after I lobbied before Congress and wrote articles."

Mr. Chamorro said the C.I.A. had provided him with an American visa and a valid Nicaraguan passport to aid his travels while he was working with the rebel group against the Sandinista Government.

He said he made a dozen trips a year between the United States and cities in Central America between February 1983, when he was recruited to join the rebels, and November 1984. The visa, he said, was issued from the United

States Embassy in Tegucigalpa, Honduras, in December 1983 and was valid through 1987.

'Not in His Files'

"That was not in his files, I know nothing about it," Mr. Rivkind said of the visa and the Nicaraguan passport. Mr. Rivkind said new information provided by Mr. Chamorro's lawyer had been passed on to the State Department for review.

Mr. Chamorro may be able to bypass a deportation hearing if a sponsorship application made by his sister, who is a United States citizen, is processed within 60 days, Mr. Rivkind said.

An Op-Ed page article, in which Mr. Chamorro wrote that Reagan Administration policies in Nicaragua had failed and that the C.I.A. had tried to blame the rebels for mining Nicaraguan harbors, appeared in the June 24 issue of The New York Times.

Mr. Rivkind said he opened Mr. Chamorro's files after reading the article and discovered that the State Department had denied his application for asylum in December. He then issued the exclusion order.

"Everyone wants to draw the conclusion that this was done for political reasons," Mr. Rivkind said. "That would be a violation of law."

He said he had not previously acted on the case because of a backlog of immigration cases and "partly because of bureaucratic error."